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ABSTRACT

Outgrowths of Mississippi's Education Reform Act of 1982 include the development of more stringent standards for both school accreditation and teacher certification. Successful completion of staff development has become the basis for recertification of Mississippi teachers and administrators, and, beginning in the 1984-85 school year, districts seeking state accreditation have been required to establish staff development plans (SDP). During summer 1985, information was requested from 154 districts about their current and projected staff development programs. An analysis of the information returned by 127 districts provides the basis for this report, which consists of a sequence of commentaries on eight appended tables. Table 1 contains the guidelines tested during the 1984-85 school year by 16 school districts and then revised for use by all school districts in designing, developing, and implementing an SDP. Tables 2 through 7 report findings on the following topics: categories of employees receiving staff development activity offerings; when during the school year training activities were conducted; what times training activities were scheduled; the composition of the SDP's; follow-through procedures; and allocation of funds for staff development. Table 8 contains 13 recommendations based upon an analysis of the information obtained from the study. (IW)

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STAFF DEVELOPMENT IN MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLS: A PROGRAM EVALUATION

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Staff Development In Mississippi Schools:

A Program Evaluation

By

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For more than two centuries society has struggled with the controversial issue of educating its citizenry. School has become the focal point for hopes and aspirations regarding a secure future, which is founded upon democratic ideals of quality and equality of opportunity for all. Mississippi's Education Reform Act (1982) has refocused many viewpoints regarding the purpose of the educational system.

Clearly, educational excellence lies at the heart of the Education Reform Act. In order to achieve this goal a more stringent set of standards for both school accreditation and teacher certification were established. Moreover, the architects of educational reform in Mississippi viewed staff development as the mechanism school districts should use to attain desired improvements in elementary and secondary schools in the state. Based on institutional needs and designed to promote continued demonstration of the essential competencies and responsibilities necessary for the district to meet its goal, staff development focuses on the continued improvement of personnel in a school system.

Obviously, the ultimate goal of staff development for Mississippi schools is to provide a means for generating interest on the part of all school staff to make the schools in which they

work more than "passive, dull, mediocre organizations" (Danner, 1986, p. 44). Promoting a positive learning climate for staff in school districts is essential if school staff, especially teachers, are going to do any more than "just mark time" (Danner, 1986).

The relationship of effective staff development to school improvement necessary for more effective schools is significant. According to Dr. James Slezak (1984), "staff development is essential to every school program for two reasons: to improve student learning achievement and to improve school learning climate" (p.115). Further, the Southern Regional Education Board has stated that since a rather small percent of the teachers in any one year are newly trained, the largest potential for improving the overall quality of educational programs, especially teaching, will depend on staff development programs that will "motivate, stimulate, recharge, and improve the thousands of currently employed teachers" (Galambos, 1985, p.1).

In order to insure that efforts are made to address specific needs for improvement of performance of teachers and administrators, one of the six areas of the performance-based school accreditation system for schools in Mississippi is Change-Inducing Staff Development, and succesful completion of staff development will be the basis for recertification of Mississippi teachers and administrators. The Commission on Teacher and Administrator Education, Certification and Development and the Performance-Based School Assessment Task Force were created by the Education Reform Act to study and recommend revisions of the

state's certification and accreditation systems.

During the 1984-85 school year, sixteen school districts, including public and nonpublic schools participated in pilot testing the original staff development guidelines developed from the aforementioned groups, along with current research on staff development, and references to staff development found in the Education Reform Act. These guidelines (as evidenced on Table 1) were revised based upon the year of pilot testing and extensive input from schools and districts in Mississippi, and are to be used by all school districts in designing, developing, and implementing a comprehensive staff development program or modifying, if necessary, an ongoing staff development program.

Summary of Findings

The 1984-85 school year marked the beginning of "required" staff development plans (SDP) for districts seeking state accreditation. During the summer of 1985, information was requested from the local school districts about staff development programs for the 1984-85 school year. A total of 127 districts out of 154 responded. An analysis of this information and the 1985-86 SDPs submitted in June 1985 for approval by the staff development committee provides the basis for the information described in this section of the report.

Based on the summary of data from 1984-85 SDPs, staff development programs in many school districts focused primarily on activities for certified staff (See Table 2). These data from 1984-85 SDPs reveal that a majority of the school districts reporting (61%) did not offer staff development components to all personnel. Those groups who were not offered staff development activities were non-certified staff including maintenance/janitorial staff, auxiliary staff, secretarial staff, food service personnel, bus drivers, and Chapter 1 aides.

The scheduling of staff development activities (See Table 3) during 1984-85 seemed to occur primarily prior to the beginning of the school year (64%) and at regular intervals during the school year (56%). Monthly staff training activities occurred in 26% of the districts reporting while 4% conducted training activities at the end of each six or nine week grading period.

Staff development requirements mandate that staff development activities occur during the contractual period. Results indicated that most districts conduct training activities during full working days (56%) or on sixty percent instructional days (57%); thirty-eight districts (31%) conducted staff development training immediately after school. Additionally, a small percentage of districts reporting (2%) indicated that staff training activities for both certified and non-certified staff were conducted in the evenings, and one district reported conducting staff development activities on Saturdays.

The Reform Act specifies that the district staff development committee be comprised of teachers, administrators, the school board, and the lay public; however, the guidelines presently do not specify numbers for each of these groups. Results indicate that teachers and administrators are the groups with the most representation on the staff development committee (See Table 4). The average number of members is fourteen while the average number of administrators on the staff development committee is three, and the average number of teachers is four. Also, data indicate limited representation on the staff development committee for other school district personnel. Further, the average number of community persons on the committe is one, excluding the average of one school board member.

Analysis of 1984-85 SDPs indicate that (80%) of the staff development topics reflect a district goal or objective. Content analysis of the 1985-86 SDPs indicates that the goals and objectives of the district SDPs focus primarily on improving teaching skills of the staff (See Table 5). Objectives with the highest ranking include improving delivery skills of staff (62%); increased knowledge of educational reform specifically dealing with effective schools research, performance-based accreditation, and general information about the Reform Act (37%); refining content of instructional programs (29%); work on instructional management plans (24%), and specific training on classroom management skills (21%). Other objectives with lower rankings include improving school/classroom environment, providing a system for evaluation, and creating a positive relationship

between the school and the home and community.

The types of staff development activities offered during 1985-86 to promote attainment of the described objectives include training sessions focusing on classroom management/assertive discipline (48%); teaching strategies such as team teaching, mastery teaching, and planning (37%); knowledge of educational reform focusing on effective school correlates (39%); school policy/procedures (18%), the Education Reform Act (9%); performance-based accreditation (5%); basic skills curriculum focus, e.g., reading, math, language arts (25%); time on task (20%), and computer knowledge (19%). Other training activities include orientation for new staff/assistant teachers (18%); stress management (17%); using audio-visuals and instructional television (13%); first-aid/mental health/counseling (12%), and school law (7%).

Successful completion of staff development activities is determined by a follow-through plan. Results of the 1985-86 SDPs indicate that the principle type of follow-through procedure is a written assignment or development of materials by the participant (48%). Implementation/integration of learned skills in the classroom is the second source of follow-through (37%), with pre-post testing of participants ranked third (34%). Additional activities include: evaluation by administrators (31%), observation/demonstration of competencies (25%), summary of activity (24%), discussion by participants (21%), revision and implementation of instructional management plans (21%), checklist/questionnaire (14%), peer observation (12%), and

formulation and implementation of discipline plan (7%) (Table 6).

Respondents indicated that most districts (59%) did not have an established system of rewards for staff development participation during 1984-85. The types of rewards listed by those (38%) who indicated that they did have an established reward system included recognition in the local newspaper, appreciation luncheon/banquet, free admission to school activities, tuition assistance, PTA tea, free lunch, and visits to other programs.

Based upon financial information reported at the end of the 1984-85 school year, the state allocation of approximately $10.70 per teacher for staff development programs provided for the 1984-85 school year represented an average of $5,187 (only fifty percent of the average total amount of $10,403.77 spent by school districts for staff development). The State allocation for staff development for the 1985-86 school year is $10.25 per teacher. Sampling done from three types of school districts representing a fairly wealthy district, a district with average funding, and a relatively lower funded district, reveals that state staff development funds comprise only five to thirty-four percent of the total funds to be spent for staff development programs (See Table 7).

In addition to the information obtained from the analysis of SDPs for 1984-85 and 1985-86, valuable input from local school districts, especially staff development coordinators, provided questions, comments, and recommendations for consideration to improve and refine the program. The following four points represent a synthesis of the information received from those sources:

1) concern over the issue of credit for staff development activities,

2) concern over the role of institutions of higher education in local district staff development programs,

3) confusion regarding recertification of teachers and administrators based upon successful completion of the SDPs, and

4) concern over the content/definition of follow-through plans.

Recommendations

Based upon an analysis of the information obtained from the SDPs along with anecdotal comments received from associated school personnel, recommendations are provided for consideration as decisions are made in efforts to refine staff development programs. Table 8 displays thirteen points which briefly describe the content of those recommendations.

TABLE 8 RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Greater representation of teachers and support personnel is needed on many local district development committees,

2) Consideration should be given to mandating a portion of staff development activities to be addressed by all school districts,

3) Consideration should be given to emphasizing the importance of support activities in local school district programs,

4) Consideration should be given to establishing a maximum number of credits to be allowed for successful completion of professional conferences, workshops, etc.,

5) Consideration should be given to describing and emphasizing the role of institutions of higher education in local school district staff development programs (Seven specific recommendations are included within this issue),

6) There should be an emphasis placed on staff development for all personnel in local staff development plans,

7) Consideration should be given to the delineation of specific staff development requirements for a) personnel such as food service staff and b) for the renewal of teaching certificates,

8) Clarification should be given regarding staff development requirements for administrators (Three specific recommendations are cited within this issue),

9) It is recommended that a format for amendments to local district staff development plans be created,

10) Additional examples and assistance needs to be provided to local districts concerning the development of follow-through plans,

TABLE 8 (Continued)

11) It is recommended that examples of formats for documenting focus faculty meetings and district and school committee meetings should be available for use by local districts,

12) Additional funding for staff development programs should be sought by local districts, institutions of higher education, and the State Department of Education, and

13) Consideration should be given to altering the format of the staff development Resource Directory (especially in areas considering the appropriateness of professional conferences and workshops to be included as a part of the district's staff development plan).

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TABLE 1 STAFF DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES

1. The SDP shall be comprehensive in nature, reflecting all components of the staff development program, to include goals and objectives which are based on an assessment of district needs including personnel appraisal evaluators, a staff reward system, strategies for implementation including training and support activities, administrative support strategies, and strategies for evaluation and revision.

2. The plan shall assure that all personnel employed by a local school district are to be involved in staff development activities. Certified personnel and assistant teachers shall be involved in these activities on an annual basis. All other personnel shall be involved in district activities as needs arise, but shall accrue a minimum of 15 credits over a five year period.

3. The plan shall be prepared by a district-wide committee appointed by the superintendent. The committee shall consist of teachers, administrators, school board members, and lay people. The superintendent and the board of trustees shall approve the plan before it is submitted for final approval.

4. The plan shall specify information about planned training and support activities.

5. The plan shall specify the levels and types of administrative support to be provided to the staff development program.

6. The plan shall specify a method or methods to be used to evaluate the performance of each participant on each planned activity in order to determine successful completion of the staff development program.

From: Guidelines for staff development programs, 1985, Bureau of School Improvement, State Department of Education, Jackson, MS.

TABLE 2

1984-85 STAFF DEVELOPMENT PLANS

WERE STAFF DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES OFFERED FOR ALL STAFF?
(N=127)

38% or 48 districts said YES
61% or 77 districts said NO
1% or 2 districts did not respond

Personnel not included: Auxillary Staff
Maintenance/Janitorial
Bus Drivers
Chapter I Aides
Secretarial
Food Service Workers
Non-Certified Staff

1986-87 SDPs showed that 32% or 40 districts were not offering staff development activities to these support personnel (N=123)

WHEN WERE TRAINING ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED DURING THE CURRENT SCHOOL YEAR?

Respondents were given 7 options:

1) Prior to the beginning of the school year
2) At regular intervals during the school year
3) At the end of each semester
4) At the end of each grading period
5) Monthly
6) Weekly
7) Other...

THE FOLLOWING TWO OPTIONS WERE LISTED MOST FREQUENTLY:

OPTION ONE: Prior to the beginning of the school year
(N=122)

64% or 78 districts responded that training activities took place for certified and non-certified personnel at this time.

OPTION TWO: At regular intervals during the school year

56% or 69 districts responded that training activities took place for both groups at this time.

TABLE 3

WHAT TIMES WERE TRAINING ACTIVITIES SCHEDULED?

Respondents were given 5 options:
1) During a full working day
2) 60% instructional days
3) Immediately after school
4) Evenings
5) Saturdays

TWO OPTIONS WERE LISTED MOST FREQUENTLY:

OPTION ONE: During a full working day
(N=124)

56% or 69 districts responded that training activities took place for certified and non-certified personnel at this time.

OPTION TWO: 60% Instructional days

57% or 71 districts responded that training activities took place for both groups at this time.

WERE STAFF DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED DURING THE DISTRICT'S CONTRACTUAL PERIOD?

(N=127) 87% or 110 districts said YES
5% or 7 districts said NO
8% or 10 districts did not respond

1986-87 SDPs showed 32% or 40 of the districts surveyed were offering staff development activities during times when personnel were not under contract. (N=123)

TABLE 4 STAFF DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

1984-85 Data from Staff Development Plans

DATA INDICATED THAT TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS COMPRISED MOST OF THE REPRESENTATION FOR THESE COMMITTEES.

Administrators averaged 3 representatives
Teachers averaged 4 representatives
School Board and Community Persons averaged 1 representative

The average number of representatives on the committees was 14.

Data from 1986-87 SDPs showed
46% or 57 districts did not have a board member on their committee
30% or 37 districts did not have a lay person on their committee
10% or 11 districts needed additional administrative personnel on their committee.

TABLE 5 LIST OF ACTIVITIES

1985-86 SDPs (N=156)

DATA INDICATED THAT THE GOALS/OBJECTIVES WITH THE HIGHEST RANKING WERE THOSE FOCUSING ON IMPROVING THE TEACHING SKILLS OF STAFF.

For Example: Training on classroom management skills
Refining instructional management programs
Information about the Reform Act
Training for assistant teachers/aides

1986-87 SDPs (Limited sample of 27 district plans)

AGAIN DATA INDICATE THAT ACTIVITIES ARE CENTERING ON THE IMPROVEMENT OF TEACHING SKILLS.

For Example: Review of the MTAI
Interpretation of test results
Assertive discipline/Classroom management
Curriculum improvement

TABLE 6 FOLLOW-THROUGH PROCEDURES

1985-86 SDPs

DATA INDICATED THAT THE PRINCIPLE TYPE OF FOLLOW-THROUGH PROCEDURE WAS A WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT OR DEVELOPMENT OF MATERIAL BY THE PARTICIPANT.

IMPLEMENTATION/INTEGRATION OF LEARNED SKILLS IN THE CLASSROOM WAS THE SECOND SOURCE OF FOLLOW-THROUGH, WITH PRE/POST TESTING OF PARTICIPANTS RANKING THIRD.

1986-87 SDPs (N=27)

AGAIN A WRITTEN REPORT/ASSIGNMENT BY THE PARTICIPANT WAS THE HIGHEST RANKING FOLLOW-THROUGH PROCEDURE.

DEMONSTRATION OF THE NEW SKILL BY THE PARTICIPANT RANKED SECOND WITH OBSERVATION BY THE PRINCIPAL LISTED AS THE THIRD HIGHEST FOLLOW-THROUGH PROCEDURE.

TABLE 7 ALLOCATION OF FUNDS FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT

1984-85 Staff Development Plans

Respondents were given 6 response categories:
1) Federal Funds
2) State Funds
3) Local Funds
4) Community In-Kind Services
5) Local/Area Professional Services
6) Other

FEDERAL FUNDS: Range 0 - $150,000
Average: $3,091
(49% or 62 districts showed $0 or no response)

STATE FUNDS: Range 0 - $54,981
Average: $5,187
(5% or 6 districts showed $0 or no response)

LOCAL FUNDS: Range 0 - $55,000
Average: $2,069
(48% or 61 districts showed $0 or no response)

COMMUNITY IN-KIND SERVICES: Range 0 - $3,000
Average: $68.35
(86% or 113 districts showed $0 or no response)

LOCAL/AREA PROFESSIONAL SERVICES: Range 0 - $20,000
Average: $195.00
(92% or 117 districts showed $0 or no response)

OTHER: Range 0 - $50,993
Average: $473.00
(94% or 120 districts showed $0 or no response)

DATA INDICATE THAT THE STATE IS BEARING THE PRINCIPLE BURDEN OF FUNDING STAFF DEVELOPMENT, WITH FEDERAL FUNDS REPRESENTING THE SECOND FUNDING SOURCE.